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ABSTRACT

Cornell's experience over the last decade suggests that writing across the curriculum programs should not be housed in English departments. In fact, that experience, which has been largely successful, suggests writing programs are best off as independent departments, directed by rotating members from a variety of disciplines. The reasons are as follows. First, a separate program is important because it is separate allowing it to keep its mind, energy and resources on writing. Second, it is financially independent not having to depend on the good-will or sympathy of a parent department. With its own funds, it can encourage the participation of departments and reward collaboration. Third, as a separate department, it can insist that its directors are given the latitude and time to be administratively inventive. The director of the program at Cornell, Fredric Bogel, worked hard to establish training programs. His attention to grant-writing resulted in a major endowment and a new name, the "John S. Knight Writing Program." Before he would even agree to take the job, the second director, Harry Shaw, secured a guarantee from the Provost that no more than 17 students would be admitted to the Freshman Writing Seminars. Writing seminars, one-third of which are taught by full-time faculty, are offered in more than 100 different areas, such as "Art in the Modern Era: or Modernist Primitivism," "Assimilation, Accommodation, and Conflict: American Ethics in Transition," "B. H. (Before Hillary): Women and American Politics, 1900-1993." Includes 9 notes. Contains 12 references. (TB)

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The Writing Program in the University: A Case Study of Collaborative Efforts

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The Writing Program in the University:
The Need for Collaborative Effort

This year at Cornell, faculty and administration have been deliberating about trends that will affect teaching and learning at universities. As a tuition-paying parent, I could have told members of the committees I'm on that in the future economic considerations will be a driving force. But they already knew, as we all know, that colleges and universities are struggling with economic issues, and that these issues affect how, and what, we teach our students. We all already know that an unwelcome urgency can develop to make teaching cost-effective at the expense of educational goals. Some writing programs, for instance, are glancing upward at the dangling financial ax--clearly an educational peril. It's worth considering what can make a writing program an integral part of a university, so that it doesn't become one of the first targets when unpleasant cuts have to be made, so that it's recognized and treated as vital to the educational mission of the university.

A writing program that is set up in a marginalized and precarious position, that sees itself as marginalized, and that so carries out its activities, will have trouble with long-term survival; it will in fact have trouble doing its job well at any point. Yet too often that's exactly the situation in which writing programs find themselves. Some writing programs, for instance, survive successfully just about as long as a special grant on which they are founded survives; they're not given permanent funding or control of funding. Administrators and teachers in the programs may occupy precarious lines, or while bearing heavy teaching loads may be expected to develop the program and educate the rest of the faculty. Probably the heaviest burden a writing program can bear is the one that occurs when it has been established by top-down fiat and then virtually abandoned: "We've hired a writing across the curriculum director, we've hired a writing program director, and now our work is

done--you do the rest or make someone else do it."

Observing the difficulties under which some writing programs labor, I've come deeply to appreciate the major principle under which Cornell's Writing Program was established and under which it operates--collaboration. Oddly, but appropriately enough, at the heart of Cornell's collaboration is a tradition of departmental territorialism, a tradition which the university gladly fostered and from which my experience suggests any writng program can benefit. Back in the '60s, when the English Department questioned its responsibility for freshman composition, the university found many departments eager to take up the job and to claim the teaching of writing for their own fields. In the late sixties, therefore, "humanities seminars" at Cornell were born, with offerings, for instance, in the departments of art history, government, psychology, and history, as well as in English; the English Department became the coordinator of these efforts. Out of territorialism *can* be born a collaborative effort to teach students to write, and in fact this is how successful programs of any sort often seem to begin: departments and individual faculty members initiate a program and claim it as their own.

Good intentions and good will aren't enough to keep a program going, however, if it isn't appropriately set up and administered. Cornell's new humanities seminars were long run by the English department, with faculty members delegated to act as director and manage attention to training and faculty development--a situation much like that found today at many colleges and universities. Good work did occur, but the program ran into trouble during the late '70s, when there was general dissatisfaction: seminars weren't teaching writing, they weren't asking for enough papers, and so on. Solutions, fortunately, were not imposed by one administrator or by a few members of the English department. That approach would surely at Cornell, as elsewhere, have been resisted. Wisely, collaboration was again the chosen principle: a university-wide committee of faculty and administrators was

formed to investigate the situation and propose solutions.

The committee produced excellent recommendations, which bear close examination here. The central recommendation was especially important, namely for the creation of a separate writing program, *not* situated in a department, and having its own director. A second significant recommendation was that the directorship should rotate regularly, with a faculty member holding the position, and not necessarily a faculty member from the English Department. These two steps--the establishment of a separate writing program with its own budget, and the establishment of directors drawn from the tenured faculty of various departments--can be, to my mind, crucial steps in the growth and success of writing in the university, for as Toby Fulwiler and Art Young have observed, the "enemies" to success are "uncertain leadership" and a program without a secure place in the academic structure (288-89).

In the deliberation about whether or not English departments should house writing across the curriculum, Cornell's experience urges that they should not, and I would urge that many writing programs might be better off separately housed.[1] First of all, a separate program is important because it *is* separate: It keeps its mind, energy, and resources on writing. Cornell's Writing Program, newly re-organized and re-established in 1982, could, as charged by the university, immediately address the problem of seminars that forgot to teach writing: we established guidelines for the uses of writing in all seminars, we set up training programs and faculty incentives, we wrote and published a handbook. We added "Writing" to the title "Freshman Seminars"! With every step we could concentrate on eliminating merely additive writing, so that seminars became truly writing in the university, or writing across the curriculum, in the senses that Susan MacLeod has summarized as "cognitively based (on the idea of writing as a mode of learning) or rhetorically based (on the idea of introducing students to the discourse communities of various disciplines)" ("Second

Stage," 342).

Another benefit of a separate writing program can be that it does not depend on the good will or sympathy of a housing department and its chair for its survival. If the university truly believes in the role of a writing program, it should fund that program so that it can do its work without fear of imminent demise, without begging each year for stamp money, let alone funds for courses. The writing program should not constantly have to persuade the home department to supply funds or to give its faculty support for their work.

A separate writing program with independent control of funding can also encourage the participation of departments and reward collaboration. Departments at Cornell that offer Freshman Writing Seminars receive support for graduate students who teach them; the Writing Program helps to distribute these funds. We can determine that distribution by reviewing faculty mentorship of TAs during the year, by checking the quality of TAs being proposed by departments, by paying close attention to student evaluations submitted each semester. Giving graduate students summer support for internships with experienced teachers, financially rewarding faculty who participate in our Faculty Seminar for Writing Instruction--this is the kind of tangible support that can help faculty and graduate students to have a stake in the Writing Program. Financial encouragement may not be needed once a program is underway, as many faculty do want to use writing to improve their teaching and do not need financial incentives, but a financial reward can help found programs. Just as important, the tangible support indicates university commitment, and that in itself encourages the commitment of individuals.

The directorship of a writing program can also be crucial to its success and to its collaborative integration into university. Will a writing program disappear when someone retires or tires of the work and returns to teaching literature or other courses in a specialized field? Are the writing program's permanent teachers too overworked

to put energy into collaborative efforts and administrative tasks? Cornell's Writing Program has found it successful to have a rotating directorship held by a faculty member from one of the participating departments, with released time to do this job. As part of the Writing Program's administration for over ten years, I have seen what the involvement of new faculty can mean. "Programs that have successfully negotiated funding rapids," Susan McLeod says, "report that key administrators are usually responsible for making sure that essential funding (in the form of released time for a director of the WAC [writing across the curriculum] program and monies for faculty development) is provided internally" ("Second Stage," 338-39). At Cornell, the faculty Director of the Writing Program, who collaborates with the Dean or Provost in these and other matters, is just such a key administrator. The faculty directors of the Writing Program, having close contact with the writing program and writing program staff, have worked steadily and successfully for the program's financial security, for development of new projects, and for the well-being and effectiveness of writing program staff (for instance, released time and satisfactory course loads)--it's essential that a writing program's staff work with faculty administrators who will understand and act as advocates for their needs.

A few examples: The first director of the newly reorganized Writing Program, Fredric Bogel, an exceptional scholar hired from outside for the position, brought fresh intellectual energy and respectibility to the Program, for graduate students and faculty alike. Knowing he had just four years in which to make a mark, he made sure we worked hard, for instance, to establish an effective TA training program and that standards were high for all seminars. Bogel also attended to grant-writing, resulting in a major endowment and a new name–the John S. Knight Writing Program. Before he would even agree to take the job, our second director, Harry Shaw, worked collaboratively with the administration and faculty for further improvements: he immediately elicited a guarantee from the Provost that seminars would never have

more than seventeen students, no matter what bulges occur in the size of the freshman class. Turning his attention to the faculty, Shaw began a six-week summer Faculty Seminar in Writing Instruction, developing it with outside assistance from James Slevin, who continues to come to Cornell as a visiting professor each summer. Shaw also worked *with* the administration: He collaborated with the Dean of Arts and Sciences to invent an important new program, Writing in the Majors (a program I will describe later) , and to win an internal grant for it. Through collaboration with faculty and administration Shaw so thoroughly established the prestige of Writing in the Majorsthat the university now uses its own funds to help keep it going, perhaps the most important sign of success a program can have. The third and present Writing Program director, Jonathan Monroe, comes from the faculty of the Department of Comparative Literature; like his predecessors he has arrived with the vigor of new ideas and a new perspective as he seeks new ways to collaborate with departments in the mentorship of graduate students and works on ways to help graduate students collaborate with each other as teachers.

Writing program directors need plenty of free time in order to contact and work with faculty, as U. Penn's Peshe Kuriloff advises.[2] I would add that it is important for a writing program to employ committed full-time professional staff who are given time for their work with faculty and graduate students. Many of our programs depend on efforts and incentives coming from the Writing Program's permanent staff. My own job, for instance, is to direct the Freshman Writing Seminars. Another member of our staff directs Writing in the Majors; another directs the tutorial service; still another directs the Writing Workshop. All of these jobs entail work invaluable to the university, involving as they do faculty and TA development as well as other services for students.

But a writing program cannot depend only on its own efforts for survival in– or even true service to–the university. WAC money and top-down program building

alone do not work: "Finding ways to harness the efforts of the disciplines--where the faculty's primary loyalty and interest lie--will perhaps achieve more in the long run than structurally separate programs, no matter how well intentioned and well financed" (Russell 304). While I argue that a structurally separate program is needed, it's clear that the successful integration of writing and of a writing program into the university depends upon harnessing the efforts of the disciplines– or rather not on *our* harnessing those efforts but rather on encouraging disciplines themselves to harness their own energy.

As I indicated earlier, the disciplines at Cornell have already claimed the teaching of Freshman Writing Seminars. The success of seminars with students and faculty alike lies in the fact that they are offered by many departments, so that in any one semester students may choose from over one-hundred different courses, such as "Arguments good and bad" (Philosophy), "Art in the Modern Era: or Modernist Primitivism" (Art History), "Assimilation, Accommodation, and Conflict: American Ethnics in Transition" (Sociology), "B.H. (Before Hillary): Women and American Politics, 1900-1993" (History), "Biology on Women and Women in Biology" (Science and Technology Studies), and "The Black Experience in Writing: or The Political Economy of Racism" (Africana Studies).[3] One-third of the seminars are taught by faculty; the remaining two-thirds are taught by graduate students. The separate writing program puts its energy into encouraging and enabling the efforts of faculty and graduate students in the thirty-some departments and programs actively involved in teaching Freshman Writing Seminars, into helping faculty from music, and graduate students from biology with the idea of teaching writing and of using writing to encourage learning in their subjects.[4]

How does the program help them? What makes this kind of university-wide participation possible? David Russell has pointed out that

> Even when [writing across the curriculum] programs attempt to make writing part of every class, every discipline, the writing can be marginalized if it is perceived as an additional burden rather than as an intrinsic part of learning. At some institutions, administrators have attempted to impose WAC by fiat . . . Naturally, faculty resent and resist the imposition, considering it 'doing the English teacher's job' or 'adding writing' of the traditional evaluative kind . . ." (297).

Cornell, as we have seen, did not impose the "burden" of teaching writing "by fiat," which can indeed toll the death knell of a WAC writing program. When this fall a professor from Plant Pathology taught a Freshman Writing Seminar for the first time, it was by choice. When he first talked with me, however, he was "afraid to teach writing." One of his first questions (as is so often the case) was about how much grammar he needed to know. He was thinking of writing as "additive" to his course, and he surely saw the job as potentially burdensome. Having taught the seminar, he now encourages us to quote him as saying he never had more fun teaching in his life. What happened to cause this transformation?

Before beginning his teaching, the Plant Pathology professor decided to take a two-day workshop offered as one part of the "Seminar in Writing Instruction," a summer program established by the Writing Program for faculty members. From this seminar he learned about an emphasis which is also crucial to "Teaching Writing," the Writing Program's six-week training course required of all graduate students who teach a writing seminar. *The emphasis is on designing writing assignments that grow out of the nature and interests of the discipline.* The Writing Program encourages teachers of Freshman Writing Seminars to consider from the first moment how writing in their courses will become an *integral* part of how students read and think about assigned texts, and about their own writing. Instructors are encouraged to think about asking

for rough drafts and revisions, to design assignments that are connected to each other, to decide how to prepare students, with writing, for the writing of essays--all the methods so familiar to professional teachers of writing.

But just as important, we try to help faculty members and TAs discover that, as writing and reading scholars, they come prepared for this kind of teaching and that in fact approaches they may develop with our help improve their teaching. *The Plant Pathology scholar acted on what he knew already about language in his discipline* in order to engage students through writing with issues of concern in his seminar, "Plant, Pesticides, People, and Politics." Students had to investigate how others had written, whether in the professional readings or in their classmates' texts; they had to analyze and criticize that writing and respond to it. They entered a collaborative dialogue with their professor. The professor realized he wasn't teaching a grammar course (although he did teach grammar along the way). He was teaching a course in which students write to learn, and learn to write.

It's become a commonplace that students in writing courses are necessarily involved in an on-going process of inventing the university. In a very real sense we helped the Plant Pathology professor invent the Writing Program. For the Writing Program itself is constantly reshaped, revitalized--reinvented--by faculty members and graduate students as they discover ways to teach their students and as they explore the rhetoric of their own discourses. This revitalizing and reshaping occurs also through the collaboration of instructors with each other. Faculty return as experienced teachers to the training course, Teaching Writing, to work with new graduate students, and they participate as alums in the Faculty Seminar in Writing Instruction. Our goal is that through their collaboration faculty members and graduate students should *own* the Freshman Writing Seminars and the training programs. This approach certainly worked in Plant Pathology, where another faculty member and a graduate student will participate next year thanks to reports from the

first professor.

But we don't always succeed with faculty members or graduate students, and the failures usually come where collaboration breaks down. If faculty members neglect thoughtful work as mentors for graduate students who are teaching freshman writing seminars, some graduate students may have "an attitude" about teaching. The Writing Program must work steadily to keep faculty members aware of and supportive of their TAs as teachers. Occasionally faculty members try teaching seminars and to their surprise find it takes a *lot* of time and work. Some don't return to the job, or do so only reluctantly. Others, however, having participated in the Faculty Seminar and worked with graduate students, perhaps in Teaching Writing, become committed participants, time investment and all. They know the work matters, and that it is theirs.

To further promote faculty involvement, the Knight Writing Program also concentrates on an important initiative that began in 1987: Writing in the Majors. Here we work with upper-level, required courses in disciplines that traditionally focus less on writing, courses such as biology, astronomy, or economics. We do not encourage faculty members of these courses to "teach writing"; in fact, we will not work with faculty members who want the Writing Program to supply the "writing segment." Instead, the Writing Program's goal for faculty members is that they discover uses of writing that will improve their teaching of the subject matter--again thereby contributing to the ongoing reinvention of the Writing Program. The Knight Writing Program provides financial support for one or more TAs who will assist with the increased burdens of the course. These TAs take the six-week training course in "Teaching Writing," during which time they work closely with a senior lecturer in the Writing Program, Keith Hjortshoj, the Writing in the Majors director, who also consults with the faculty during preparation for and teaching of the course.

Writing in the Majors continues to grow steadily.[5] Faculty members and

assisting TAs alike love it. So do the students--when they discover they're part of it. Mostly they simply notice that they're part of an unusually good course. What's special about Writing in the Majors? And what are its attractions for faculty members? Keith Hjortshoj, the director, believes that many inter-disciplinary programs encounter resistance because "they attempt to distribute responsibility for writing instruction throughout the curriculum while retaining centralized authority over language." Writing in the Majors courses have no mandates and fulfill no special requirements in writing. We encounter little resistance because, as Keith points out, we offer little to resist. Faculty respond to the program because, as we have found, most good teachers are perpetually looking for a better way to teach and see in our help an "opportunity to enrich education through active uses of language" (Developments, 16). Accordingly,

> . . .we [encourage] people to pay attention to the uses of language in their courses and disciplines, both in writing and in reading, and sometimes in speaking and listening too. This, at least, is the central goal of Writing in the Majors, which emphasizes the vital connections between language and learning at upper levels of the curriculum. It doesn't . . . attach any kind of exclusive significance to writing, or even to writing instruction. Initiatives evolve, instead, from faculty members' concerns about learning issues that involve uses of language in many forms . . . . That's why we quickly engaged so many people in the sciences, who sensed a need for kinds of instruction and practice that were not included in the traditional science curriculum, but were essential to scientific learning and professions" (Letter).

We succeed, then, with Writing in the Majors because we work from the concerns and knowledge of faculty members; what we know about uses of writing

acts as a springboard for them to explore and perhaps even transform the nature and use of language in their own disciplines.[6] We do not provide "experts" in rhetoric to plan courses or correct papers. Rather, faculty members and graduate students within the fields provide the insights. A physics professor, for instance, recently completed a fascinating study on the rhetorical uses of citations in publications.[7] This kind of process sometimes has led faculty members to abandon exams and always to explore richer, fuller uses of writing for students. In a lab, students may produce carefully constructed experiment abstracts; in a senior level course on particle physics, they may write research papers that draw on the professional literature and are written on the level of professional scientists.

TAs, trained in the Writing Program's Teaching Writing course contribute still more ideas and energy crucial to the program's success.[8] In fact, as attention to the connection between language and learning has increased, attention to the general training and contributions of TAs has also intensified, drawing them into closer collaboration with faculty members and students in the courses in which they are involved. Writing in the Majors now assists with TA training in biology and chemistry lab courses. It has also started a peer tutoring program for biology.[9]

A final comment. At Cornell, the Knight Writing Program's success would have been impossible without the collaborative efforts of an administration which believes in the importance of writing as part of the undergraduate experience. The Deans of the College of Arts and Sciences have wholeheartedly supported the Writing Program, even in fund-cutting times. It's significant that our Deans have participated in and continue to participate in the Writing Program as teachers. One taught seminars regularly before becoming a dean and also took the Faculty Seminar in the Teaching of Writing, to which he returns most years as a participating alum. Even without these experiences, he would have supported the Writing Program, but his having been a successful participant surely has contributed to his continuing interest

and involvement. An outspoken and constant supporter of our work, he knows firsthand what it is. In a reverse path, a previous Dean, to whom we constantly turned for support as we developed new programs, is now teaching a course for Writing in the Majors, the program he helped get underway.

I've outlined some strategies for helping a writing program become an integral part of a university's work. Put departments and faculty members in the center, with courses and uses of writing that are important to their own interests, and give writing programs separate status and staff so that they have the time and impetus for genuinely collaborative efforts with the faculty and administration. For, to succeed, writing programs must be *in* the University. Rather than working from an adversarial or "janitorial" position, writing programs must work collaboratively with faculty and administration, drawing on *their* beliefs, *their* enthusiasm. The Writing Program must become a means through which the university accomplishes its ends. As I explain to graduate students in the training course, who wish to tell their freshmen what "The Writing Program" wants them to do: when you step into the classroom, *you* are the Writing Program. Be a good one.

Endnotes

[1]See Louise Z Smith and Catherine Pastore Blair.

[2]Dr. Kurloff made this point at a meeting of Ivy League Writing Program Administrators. Harvard University, 1993.

[3]Some students are invited to, or elect to, take a special Writing Workshop course. These workshop courses are still smaller in size--twelve students rather than seventeen--and can be taken only S/U, where regular seminars are offered letter-grade only. The Workshop courses, I might add, are not taught by TAs, but by full-time, continuing-appointment senior lecturers. The presence of these lecturers, who are also involved in the full range of the Writing Program's other activities, is vital to our success in the University.

[4]Each semester we encourage excellence in this kind of preparation and teaching by giving substantial cash prizes to outstanding assignment sequences; each year a major fellowship is awarded to the TA who has developed the best new course proposal.

[5]Since 1988, Writing in the Majors has supported initiatives in 30 courses in 12 departments, courses that have enrolled, over the years, about 3000 upper-division students. The program has worked directly with about 50 faculty members and 75 graduate teaching assistants. Keith Hjortshoj has also worked with roughly 100 teaching assistants in introductory chemistry and biology courses.

[6] Our approach is one Jones and Comprone promote: "This dialogue [between faculty and WAC] must work toward balancing humanistic methods of encouraging more active and collaborative learning in WAC courses with reinforcing the ways of knowing and the writing conventions of different discourse communities" (Jones and Comprone, 61).

[7] Susan McLeod considers among the most interesting developments at universities the exploration of "the relationship between rhetoric and ways of knowing and thinking in disciplinary communities." ("Second Stage," 340). We agree that the results are fascinating, and productive.

[8]We capitalize on a resource that Ellen Strenski has also noted: ". . . TAs tend to have energy and enthusiasm, and most research universities have at least a minimal TA training program where TAs, unlike professors, can be given explicit instruction" (37). We have found, however, that the energy and

enthusiasm of faculty members is not to be underrated.

[9]It is worth noting the collaborative approach and emphasis on language employed by Writing in the Majors recently received a telling vote of institutional confidence. When the university applied for a Lilly grant to develop teaching skills among junior faculty, it chose to emphasize language and learning in the sciences and engineering through Writing in the Majors and the Engineering Communications Program; it received the grant.

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